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Letter from Oklahoma

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Letter from Oklahoma

Buddy, Can You Spare Me a Write?

by **Tom Leonhardt** (University of Oklahoma)
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Recently on a listserv about librarians and libraries, there was an exchange that touched on many things about how we (librarians) communicate. Someone suggested that we tend to post short, informational, and practical comments on the Internet because _____. You can fill in the blank with your own reason and feel confident that it was covered in this debate. I might add that the comments about short comments were short comments themselves. Meanwhile, most subscribers to the list just sat back and lurked or, after umpteen boring responses, began to delete without reading. There are many reasons why people don't write lengthy postings to listservs, some for the same reasons most of us don't write anything for publication and some because of the very nature of the listservs and the Internet.

Why don't more librarians write for publication? I know librarians with something to say but they don't write those articles that their colleagues would profit from reading. Library association conferences provide one way of sharing our thoughts and experiences with colleagues but with a few exceptions, most conference papers are never published and some should not be. Many, however good they were as talks, are never put into publishable form. There are good reasons why they are not published. In fact, every reason not to write for publication is a good reason. As for the reasons to write for publication, that is another story.



Ten Good Reasons For Not Writing

1. The work is too hard.
2. It takes too much time.
3. There are other things I would rather be doing.
So sue me!
4. All the good stuff has already been written.
5. I am afraid that I will be misunderstood.
6. I am afraid I will be understood.
7. What I have to say might offend someone.
8. I don't have to.
9. I hate winning prizes.
10. I have nothing to say.

The truth is, most of us don't write well and with facility. It is hard work and our egos take enough beatings in a lifetime even without subjecting our words and thoughts to editors, who in their infinite wisdom and heartwarming kindness, inform us that our sentences are awkward, our paragraphs are poorly constructed, and our whole article is so disorganized that it would take a certified wilderness guide to get out of it with a single idea. To write for publication is to take a risk. You can be misunderstood, you can be understood all too clearly, you can be wrong (premise, conclusion, facts), you can be ridiculed, you can be ignored. Ah, there's the rub. Even a good piece of writing is seldom acknowledged beyond its appearance in a publication and an index. What a thankless task.

To write for publication is to answer a call and it is not always or even primarily the call for tenure review. To write is to be vain enough to think that our thoughts might be of value. To write is to be humble enough to know that our best will never be good enough. To write is to offer something to unknown readers, not with a thought towards fame and fortune, but with the hope that a sympathetic chord will be struck, a point of light will appear, an unheard voice will say, "I really enjoyed that." ☘

Profiles Encouraged:

Thomas W. Leonhardt



Born: February 7, 1943, Wilmington, North Carolina. I grew up in North Carolina, Kansas, California, Alaska (Territory), Virginia, and Germany.

Current Residence: Norman, Oklahoma

Resume: I attended the University of North Carolina (that's all you had to say in 1961) before enlisting in the Army. After three years of serving my country I earned an A.A. degree from Pasadena City College and a B.A. (German) and M.L.S. from the University of California, Berkeley. I have held library positions at Stanford, Boise State, Duke, Oregon, Pacific, and Oklahoma. I am currently director of library technical services at the University of Oklahoma.

Family: I am married and have four children, two girls, two boys.

Proudest accomplishment: It is too soon to say.

First job: Sacking groceries for tips at the Big Delta, Alaska commissary.

Fondest Memory: My children growing up.

Favorite pastime: Reading, writing, playing the guitar and trumpet, and listening to music.

Most recent book read: *Kolymsky Heights* by Lionel Davidson.

Pet Peeves: Celebrity "news" casters, sports announcers, and the TV morning show people.

What would you like to be doing five years from now: Breathing on my own.

Single most important piece of advice: To thine own self be true.

Biggest surprise: Getting to graduate from UC Berkeley in cap and gown in 1990, twenty years after earning my B.A. Power to the People!